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ABSTRACT

The findings of this national survey of public attitudes are the second in a series of reports reflecting important trends in American society. The survey is one of a number made on behalf of the life insurance business by the Institute of Life Insurance. Data for the survey were collected in personal interviews with 1,500 to 3,000 adults. Scientific procedures were followed to make the samples representative of the United States population 18 years old and over. Findings report the public's view on new attitudes toward the family, changes in traditional sex roles, people's orientation toward the present versus the future, feelings of personal control or lack of control, consumerism, civil rights, birth control, gun control, marijuana legalization, and communal living. The findings are reported in statistical percentage charts, along with brief narratives which analyze and interpret the data. (Author/JR)

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Current Social Issues
The Public's View

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Current Social Issues

The Public's View

Findings from a series
of national surveys
Spring 1975

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FOREWORD

Current Social Issues: The Public's View is the second in a series of reports reflecting important trends in American society. The selected findings are from national surveys of public attitudes made on behalf of the life insurance business by the Institute of Life Insurance.

For many years the Institute's research program has both sponsored and conducted diverse studies of the social environment. Starting in 1968, an annual national survey of adults' attitudes was added. Timely new questions are investigated each year, but emphasis is kept on systematic monitoring of attitude change by repeating questions from survey to survey, holding methodology constant. This practice has generated a great deal of information about important trends in public attitudes toward current social issues.

The findings that follow show the public's views on some of the most fundamental issues before our society: new attitudes toward the family; changes in traditional sex roles; people's orientation toward the present versus the future; feelings of personal control, or lack of control, over key areas of life . . .

Data for the several surveys reported on were collected in personal interviews with 1,500 to 3,000 adults. Scientific sampling procedures were followed to make the samples representative of the United States population 18 years old and over.

Findings from the Institute's research program have been used over the years by social scientists, religious leaders, journalists, speakers, students and the public as well as by people in the life insurance business. They are again invited to make use of the data presented here.

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1974 HIGHLIGHTS

- Three in four Americans believe it is perfectly all right for people to be married and to choose not to have children.

- A large majority of the public (4 in 5) agree with the statement, "The traditional family is important to American society and should be preserved." In 1973, 3 in 4 agreed.

- Two in three women feel they have not been personally affected by the women's liberation movement.

- The statement "Woman's place is in the home" is agreed with by 1 in 2.

- Consumerism remains the most widely supported social action movement in America. Since 1973, attitudes toward gun control have polarized,and the proportion of people completely against the legalization of marijuana has grown substantially.

- The amount of control the public feels over key areas of life has dropped since 1968. Only 39 percent feel a great deal of control over accumulating funds for retirement, a decline of 19 percentage points in the six-year period.

- At least 9 in 10 people believe that all Americans--whether they can pay for it or not--are entitled to an adequate pension, support for dependents upon death of a breadwinner, and comprehensive health care.

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THE FAMILY AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Today, social indicators show the American family is under a number of new pressures. The divorce rate is at an all-time high of 4.6 per thousand population, and the birthrate at an all-time low, 15.0 per thousand. A rapidly increasing number of wives and mothers are working outside the home. In 1973, the proportion of married women with children under age 3 in the labor force was double the proportion of such women in 1960.

The Institute's research highlights some of the emerging attitudes toward the family.

Until recent years, most people seemed to consider children an integral part of family life. But this attitude is now substantially changed. In 1973, and again in 1974, 3 in 4 adults interviewed in the Institute's surveys agreed with the statement, "It is perfectly all right to be married and to choose not to have children." Acceptance of planned childless marriage is especially high among people with annual family incomes of at least $20,000—almost 9 in 10 of them agreed with the statement. By age, respondents 25 through 29 years old were the most likely to accept the notion of a family without children.

The falling birthrate and the recently increased tendency for young married couples to delay having children are undoubtedly related to the high acceptance of planned childlessness.

	Total		Male		Female	
	1973	1974	1973	1974	1973	1974
	%	%	%	%	%	%
It is perfectly all right to be married and to choose not to have children.						
Agree	75	74	77	73	74	75
No strong opinion	16	14	16	15	15	12
Disagree	9	12	6	11	11	13

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Despite certain changes in the traditional family, there is research evidence that the institution itself continues to be highly valued by Americans, and that, perhaps, support for family life has actually grown.

In both 1973 and 1974, respondents were asked about the extent of their agreement with the statement, "The traditional family is important to American society and should be preserved." In 1973, 76 percent agreed with this; in 1974 agreement rose to 83 percent. Males especially became more likely to agree.

There were strong divergencies of opinion among age groups in both survey years. Respondents under 30 years old supported the traditional family least; in 1974, 64 percent of them felt it should be preserved. Overall, at least 90 percent in every age category 35 and over expressed support for the family. It seems likely that more of those currently under 30 will feel favorably toward the family in the future.

	Total		Male		Female	
	1973	1974	1973	1974	1973	1974
	%	%	%	%	%	%
The traditional family is important to American society and should be preserved.						
Agree	76	83	74	84	78	81
No strong opinion	16	11	17	10	15	12
Disagree	8	6	9	6	7	7

When asked in 1973 to choose among four life goals, younger adults put less emphasis on the family and more on individual development than those older. Only 62 percent of people ages 18 through 29 put "A happy family life" first in 1973; 25 percent said "The opportunity to develop as an individual" was primary. The same year, 87 percent of respondents at ages 30 and over said, "A happy family life" was more important than "The opportunity to develop as an individual," "Having a fulfilling career" or "Making a lot of money." Young people are even more individually oriented. A 1974 Institute survey found that 45 percent of Americans ages 14 through 18 put individual development before the other goals.

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	1973 Age 18-29	30-44	45+
	%	%	%
Most important:			
The opportunity to develop as an individual	25	8	6
A happy family life	62	86	88
A fulfilling career	7	3	2
Making a lot of money	4	2	3

The nation's present economic difficulties may be leading to more positive attitudes toward the family. In response to the energy crisis and inflation many people have changed their style of living, spending less time on outside entertainment (although movie attendance is up) and more time at home.

The increase in favorable attitudes toward the family may also be, in part, a reaction to the increasing societal pressures on that institution. There is less of a taboo on divorce and, as stated, the divorce rate is at an all-time high. To many, marital relationships appear tenuous. Additionally, many of the family's roles are eroding. Older people are often cared for in nursing homes, rather than in families. As more mothers work, young children will be increasingly cared for in day-care centers.

These changes are occurring at the same time that individuals are feeling less in control of their lives. If people's need for familial relationships increases as the stability of the institution seems threatened, more people can be expected to voice positive feelings about the family.

It is impossible, at this point, to know whether the present generation of young adults is more individually oriented than past generations were at the same age. Those now in their youth can, of course, be expected to become more family-oriented as they marry and have children. Some social scientists have speculated that the people born after World War II, and presently under 30 years old, will not become as family-oriented as people born before that. They cite the increased rate of social change, the development of the pill and other birth control technology, and generally higher levels of affluence as primary reasons for this.

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The Role of Women

Feminist movements are not a new phenomenon in American society. There were suffragette movements in the 1870s and 1910s, the latter leading to the enactment of the 19th Amendment which gave women the right to vote. In the 1960s, a new Women's Liberation movement was started, and has achieved widespread support (see page 18).

Has the women's movement had any marked effect on the everyday lives of Americans? Asked this question in 1974, most people, 77 percent of men and 67 percent of women, said they had been affected little or not at all as a result of the women's movement. Fourteen percent of women felt the movement had helped women generally, and 8 percent said they themselves made personal gains. Some men felt the women's movement was effective; 12 percent perceived general gains, and 4 percent of men believed they had benefited personally.

	Total	Male	Female
	%	%	%
Personal effects of Women's Liberation			
General gains	13	12	14
Personal gains	6	4	8
Already liberated	1	*	2
Little or no way affected	72	77	67
Feel negative toward movement	9	9	9

*Less than .5 percent.

The people who feel they have benefited most from the women's movement are, perhaps, the most privileged in the society: the young (men and women), the most educated and the most affluent.

Thirty-three percent of those in the age group 25 through 29 said they had benefited, compared with 15 percent of people ages 55 through 64. Thirty-seven percent of college graduates mentioned general or personal gains, but only 15 percent of high school graduates did. By income, 31 percent of people with family incomes of at least $20,000 a year said they had gained from the women's movement, compared to 14 percent with family incomes under $10,000 a year.

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The women's movement has stimulated much discussion about traditional sex roles. To get overall data on the public's view of the role of women, in both 1973 and 1974 the Institute asked for the extent of agreement with the statement, "Traditionally, men in our society have had certain responsibilities and women have had others. This is the way it should be." Three in ten respondents opposed traditional sex roles, while almost 1 in 2 favored these differences. There is reason to believe that an even higher proportion approved traditional sex roles in the past.

Attitudes toward sex roles appear related to age, family income, and education. Respondents ages 25 through 29 are the most likely to be against a conventional division of responsibilities; older people, especially those ages 55 and over, favor the traditional way most.

Proportionately fewer respondents with annual family incomes of $15,000 and over favor divided responsibilities than those with lower incomes. And as education level rises, the frequency of agreement with traditional sex roles goes down.

	Total		Males		Females	
	1973	1974	1973	1974	1973	1974
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Traditionally, men in our society have had certain responsibilities, and women have had others. This is the way it should be.						
Agree	44	48	45	49	43	46
No strong opinion	27	22	28	20	25	23
Disagree	29	30	26	29	31	30

To investigate another phase of the public's attitudes toward sex roles, in 1973 and 1974 the Institute asked the extent of agreement with the statement, "While there are some exceptions, the statement that 'woman's place is in the home' still makes sense." The distribution of answers in 1974 was almost identical with 1973's. The demographic breakdowns were also similar; the younger, the affluent, and most educated respondents disagreed most with the statement about "woman's place."

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	Total		Males		Females	
	1973	1974	1973	1974	1973	1974
	%	%	%	%	%	%
While there are some exceptions, the statement that "woman's place is in the home" still makes sense.						
Agree	49	49	48	52	49	47
No strong opinion	23	20	25	20	20	19
Disagree	28	31	27	29	29	33

The idea that mothers of young children should not take jobs has been traditional in America. Even as women's work rates are increasing rapidly, the statement, "If a woman has children, she shouldn't go to work until they are grown, unless it's an economic necessity," is agreed with by more than half of the public. In 1974 men were more likely than women to feel that mothers should stay at home; age was also a factor. Men and women under 30 years old are least supportive of the idea that mothers ought not to work, people 45 years old and over are most supportive.

	Total		Male		Female	
	1973	1974	1973	1974	1973	1974
	%	%	%	%	%	%
If a woman has children, she should not go to work until they are grown, unless it's an economic necessity.						
Agree	56	58	56	60	56	54
No strong opinion	21	18	23	18	18	18
Disagree	23	24	21	20	26	27

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On the subject of sex discrimination, in both 1973 and 1974 more than 2 in 5 people surveyed agreed with the statement, "Currently, women are not represented in large enough proportions in top government jobs, the professions, or the top management of business. This is unfortunate and should be changed." Thus, a fairly high proportion of the public believes there is sex discrimination in employment. Recently, a number of employers, including some of the largest in the nation, have been found by the courts to have practiced sex discrimination. These decisions, undoubtedly, contributed to the public's agreement on the above question. Only 1 in 4 disagreed that more women should be in top jobs.

Females more often than males think the distribution of the sexes in top jobs should be changed. As might be expected, younger people and those with larger incomes and more education most often believe that not enough women are in high positions.

	Total		Male		Female	
	1973	1974	1973	1974	1973	1974
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Currently, women are not represented in large enough proportions in top government jobs, the professions, or the top management of business. This is unfortunate and should be changed.						
Agree	42	44	38	36	46	51
No strong opinion	34	31	36	34	31	29
Disagree	24	25	26	30	23	20

It might appear paradoxical that although about half the American public feel that women, and especially mothers, should stay at home, only a quarter disagree with the idea that more women ought to be brought into top jobs. These findings seem to indicate that many of those who favor women staying in traditional roles still believe that there is sex discrimination in this society, and are opposed to it.

There are, of course, various causes of social change. The very passage of laws can lead to changed attitudes. As was pointed out above, the

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prosecution of sex discrimination cases may have influenced attitudes toward increasing the proportion of women in top positions, or at least caused more awareness of the issue.

On current attitudes toward custody of children when parents divorce, it appears that a change in attitudes might be leading to a change in social practice. Institute research shows that the public is highly accepting of fathers raising children after a divorce and government figures report a recent increase in the number of divorced fathers who have custody of their children.

In 1974, 82 percent of respondents felt that "It's all right for the fathers to get custody" of children in case of divorce. Only 15 percent said the mother should always get the children. Men and women felt the same on this issue, and there were no consistent differences related to age. Those with the highest incomes were most likely to feel (96%) that it was all right for fathers to raise their children.

	Total	Sex	
		M	F
	%	%	%
Parental responsibilities			
The mother should always have custody	15	15	14
It's all right for the father to get custody	82	82	83

Acceptance of fathers raising children represents a change in the traditional idea that only women are suited for this responsibility. Other traditional ideas about women have shown change during this decade. A large majority of the public, for example, has long felt that life insurance is a necessity. But it was often believed that women do not need as much life insurance as men. However, the proportion of adults who believe a woman should carry as much life insurance as men has grown to 39 percent, 10 percentage points more than six years ago.

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	1968	1971	1973	1974
	%	%	%	%
Women should carry:				
As much life insurance as men	29	25	36	39
Some life insurance	57	62	53	52
No life insurance coverage	10	12	10	9

The youngest people surveyed, ages 18 through 24, are now more likely than those older to feel that women should have as much life insurance as men. Sixty-two percent of the younger group feel this way, compared to 41 percent of those ages 25 through 29, and 32 percent who are 30 and over.

Although the difference is small, more men than women believe that both sexes should have equal life insurance protection.

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SEVEN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

During the 1960s, several controversial social movements came into prominence and attracted a significant number of followers. Women's liberation, consumerism, and the gun control movement are examples. Even movements with minimal support, such as the efforts for the legalization of marijuana, gained social influence. Since 1972 there has been a near cessation in the growth of many social movements, at least as measured by public acceptance, though some retain a great deal of power.

In each of the past three years, the Institute has monitored the public's views on seven prominent social movements. Attitudes of support or opposition are clearly different from active participation, but the social climate that can develop from public opinion strongly affects the ability of movements to bring about change.

From 1973 to 1974, support for the seven movements did not follow a consistent pattern: for some of them support remained at the same level, for some it increased, and for others it went down.

Attitudes Toward Various Social Movements

	Consumerism			Civil rights			Birth control			Gun control		
	1972	1973	1974	1972	1973	1974	1972	1973	1974	1972	1973	1974
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Completely for it	75	71	72	54	52	58	47	44	52	41	37	44
More for than against	15	16	17	27	28	25	24	24	20	18	21	14
More against than for	1	3	2	6	7	7	8	12	5	12	15	11
Completely against	2	4	4	5	7	5	12	14	17	23	21	27
No opinion; no answer	6	6	6	7	5	4	9	7	6	6	5	4

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	Legalization of marijuana			Women's liberation			Communal living		
	1972	1973	1974	1972	1973	1974	1972	1973	1974
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Completely for it	9	13	12	17	23	18	5	6	5
More for than against	11	10	12	32	32	38	8	11	9
More against than for	11	12	6	25	22	23	17	18	14
Completely against	62	58	68	16	13	13	63	56	64
No opinion; no answer	7	8	3	10	10	8	7	9	8

Consumerism received the most support each year. In 1972, 90 percent of Americans were basically for it; for 1974 the figure was 89 percent. Consumerism is favored most strongly by those who have attended college, people with annual family incomes of $10,000 and over, and those ages 35 through 54. Respondents who did not graduate from high school have been least likely to approve it, even though the thrust of many consumer groups is to protect the population segment most poorly equipped by education and experience in the marketplace.

Both the Civil Rights and birth control movements have found increased support. Eighty-three percent of those surveyed in 1974 were in favor of the Civil Rights movement, a gain of only 3 percentage points over the previous year. But the proportion completely for this movement climbed 6 percentage points, to 58 percent. People with annual family incomes under $10,000, those who did not finish high school, and those in the 45 through 54, and 65 and over age groups were least likely to approve the Civil Rights movement.

For birth control, overall support rose 4 percentage points to 72 percent from 1973 to 1974. Fifty-two percent were completely for the birth control movement in 1974, 8 percentage points higher than in 1973. The most support for this movement comes from those ages 25 through 29, females, people who attended college, and those with annual family incomes of $20,000 and over.

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Public attitudes toward the gun control movement are polarizing. From 1973 to 1974, the proportion completely for gun control went up 7 percentage points, to 44 percent, while the proportion completely against rose 6 percentage points, to 27 percent. If this trend continues, any resolution of the gun control issue will be even more difficult to attain than it has been so far.

As with most other social movements under present consideration, support for gun control comes most readily from the young, the affluent, and the highly educated.

Gun control is one of the two social movements included in the survey of which a greater proportion of women than men approve; as stated, birth control is the other. This seems to support some common assumptions about women's attitudes.

Perhaps surprisingly, in each survey since 1972, more males than females favored the women's movement. In 1974, 61 percent of males and 51 percent of females were for it.

The proportion in favor of the Women's Liberation movement has risen from 49 percent in 1972 to 56 percent in 1974. However, strong support for this movement has gone down since 1973. In 1974, the proportion completely for Women's Liberation dropped 5 percentage points to 18 percent, only one percentage point more than in 1972.

As the following table shows, there have been dramatic shifts in opinion about Women's Liberation in the different age categories. From 1973 to 1974, approval of this movement dropped or remained about the same for all age groups under age 45, except for ages 25 through 29. People ages 55 through 64 became much more likely to support the women's movement during this time period.

Support for Women's Movement—by Age

	Total	18/24	25/29	30/34	35/44	45/54	55/64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1972	49	53	53	51	47	43	52	42
1973	55	62	66	65	52	50	43	46
1974	56	58	83	59	53	53	60	40

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Two social movements strongly associated with the youth culture of the 1960s met with increased opposition in 1974. Although the proportion basically in favor of legalization of marijuana remained constant between 1973 and 1974, the proportion completely against it rose 10 percentage points, to 68 percent, in the one year. Despite this, about 1 in 2 respondents under age 30 approved of the movement in 1974.

Support for Legalization of Marijuana—by Age

	Total	18/24	25/29	30/34	35/44	45/54	55/64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1972	20	41	20	22	16	11	12	12
1973	23	50	34	25	13	12	11	9
1974	23	47	51	24	16	11	10	13

Overall support for the communal living movement has not changed much, but the proportion completely against it rose 8 percentage points, to 64 percent, between 1973 and 1974, after dropping 7 percentage points between 1972 and 1973. Young adults, ages 18 through 24, lessened their support of the communal living movement in 1974; this may be viewed as evidence of the weakened influence of the youth culture.

Support for Communal Living—by Age

	Total	18/24	25/29	30/34	35/44	45/54	55/64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1972	13	29	13	14	10	5	6	11
1973	17	36	28	14	14	7	6	9
1974	14	24	28	20	8	4	14	10

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FEELINGS OF CONTROL

Americans have traditionally believed that individuals can control their own destiny, that the problems people have in the world are solvable. An important component of this ideology is a belief that people should be autonomous and take command of their affairs. However, there has been recent speculation that the public is actually feeling less able now to overcome the problems they are faced with.

The Institute's research indicates that feelings of personal control have indeed gone down. In 1968, and again in 1973 and 1974, Institute national surveys asked how much control the public felt it had over nine important areas of life (see the following table). On all subjects but the "Number of children you have," perceived control declined over the six-year period. Advances in birth control technology, the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortions, and changes in attitudes toward birth control, all make controlling family size a special case.

Degree of Individual Control

	Very little			Some			Great deal		
	1968	1973	1974	1968	1973	1974	1968	1973	1974
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Preventing inflation	71	74	77	20	21	20	8	4	3
Improving availability and quality of medical care	55	59	62	27	31	30	17	10	6
Getting a better paying job	20	16	18	35	46	38	44	37	43
Improving neighborhood you live in	18	27	19	43	50	49	38	23	31
Accumulating funds for retirement	12	15	21	29	40	40	58	44	39
Saving part of earnings regularly	12	15	17	30	40	38	58	44	44
Number of children you have	11	6	6	25	19	19	63	75	74
Providing for children's college education	11	13	14	24	34	39	63	52	46
Providing for dependents if you die unexpectedly	9	11	10	27	39	35	64	50	54
Obtaining good services and products at reasonable prices	*	53	36	*	35	46	*	11	18

*Not asked in 1968.

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The amount of control the public feels over "Obtaining good services and products at reasonable prices" was measured only in 1973 and 1974, and feelings of control went up during that period.

The biggest decrease in feelings of control occurred with regard to accumulating funds for retirement, where the proportion of respondents feeling a great deal of control went down 19 percentage points, to 39 percent, in the six-year period. There were large declines in perceived control over providing for children's college education and saving part of one's earnings regularly. All of these questions are related to financial resources and reflect the growing concern Americans feel about their personal finances.

People's feelings of powerlessness were most prevalent on preventing inflation and improving the availability and quality of medical care.

In almost all areas, the older and the lowest income respondents felt the least control. For example, in 1974, 27 percent with annual incomes under $7,500 felt very little control over improving their neighborhoods, compared to 15 percent of people with incomes of $15,000 and over. By age, 26 percent of respondents 65 and over felt they had very little control over improving their neighborhoods, in contrast to 15 percent of those ages 18 through 29.

The Psychology of Entitlement

Over the past 40 years, a number of government security and education programs have been introduced. There is currently much debate about the expansion of government responsibility into providing security and other services to every citizen. What are the public's views on this issue today?

In 1974, the Institute asked, for the first time, about the extent of the public's agreement with the philosophy that all Americans—whether they can afford to pay for it or not—have a right to:

(1) comprehensive health care
(2) adequate support for dependents in case of the breadwinner's death
(3) an adequate pension at retirement age
(4) a college education
(5) decent housing
(6) a guaranteed income of at least $6,000

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On every aspect a majority felt that these services should be provided to all. For pensions, support of dependents, and comprehensive health care, at least 90 percent had this opinion.

1974 Everyone Has a Right To:	Adequate pension at retirement age	Adequate support of dependents upon death of breadwinner	Comprehensive health care
	%	%	%
Agree entirely	82	68	67
Agree somewhat	11	25	23
Disagree somewhat	4	5	6
Disagree entirely	3	2	4

	Decent housing	College education	Guaranteed Income of at least $6,000
	%	%	%
Agree entirely	59	34	37
Agree somewhat	25	30	20
Disagree somewhat	10	22	21
Disagree entirely	5	13	23

Generally, the strongest support for public benefits came from lower income and less-educated respondents. The widest divergencies of opinion appeared in the education categories, where, for example, 89 percent of those who did not graduate from high school agreed entirely that everyone should be guaranteed a pension, as against 64 percent of college graduates—a difference of 25 percentage points. Concerning support for dependents in case of a breadwinner's death, 76 percent of nonhigh school graduates agreed entirely that this should be a public right, compared with 53 percent of college graduates. Forty-two percent of nonhigh school graduates also agreed entirely that an income of at least $6,000 should be guaranteed to all; only 19 percent of college graduates felt this way.

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There seems to be widespread agreement that everyone is entitled to comprehensive health care. All demographic groups favor this in roughly the same proportions.

Feelings about other public benefits are also related, to some extent, to age and sex. In four of the six areas (all but "college education" and "adequate support of dependents"), those at ages 55 through 64 were more likely than people at other ages to agree entirely that the benefits should be provided to all. On the right to a college education and dependents' support, the 18 through 24 age group was most strongly in favor, as might be expected.

In all areas except providing for dependents—which has traditionally been considered a man's responsibility—more females than males favored public benefits.

There probably is a direct link between the weakened feelings of control over life and the high proportion who want public benefits. The fact that the older and the lower income respondents feel least control and are often most likely to favor public benefits is some evidence of the relationship between control and desire for government programs. The Institute surveys conducted in 1968 and 1973 show that those who feel least control over specific areas of life are most likely to want government and industry to become involved in those areas.

People who feel unable to obtain needed services are likely to look to others or to societal institutions for assistance, especially if they feel the services are important. Social researcher Daniel Yankelovich refers to a growing "psychology of entitlement," a complex socio-psychological process that involves the conversion of individual wants into a set of presumed rights. According to Yankelovich, the growth of the consumer movement and the expansion of the various liberation movements in the sixties showed the psychology of entitlement to be increasing. If the trend toward increased feelings of powerlessness among the public continues, it is likely that government and industry will be subject to stronger, and perhaps strident, demands from the public.

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ORIENTATION TOWARD THE PRESENT VERSUS THE FUTURE

During a time of inflation there is heightened interest by economists, sociologists, and others in the public's concern with the present versus the future. Certainly, the tendency of individuals and businesses to save, spend, or invest their money has serious implications for economic policy. The Institute began asking questions about people's attitudes in this area in 1968, and thus has accumulated trend data with which to compare attitudes during a time of relative prosperity with those in a time of economic difficulty.

Americans must be described as future-oriented. In a question asked for the first time in 1974, only 5 percent disagreed with the statement, "People should not just live for the present, but keep the future in mind." Eighty-two percent agreed, with females more likely than males to think ahead. By age, those 30 through 34 years old were the most future-minded.

	Total	Male	Female
	%	%	%
People should not just live for the present, but keep the future in mind.			
Agree	82	78	86
No strong opinion	13	16	9
Disagree	5	6	5

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Since 1968, the Institute has periodically asked the public about the extent of their agreement with the statement, "I expect to earn more money in the future, so what's the point of saving today?" In 1974, 82 percent, the highest figure recorded, disagreed with the viewpoint of this statement.

	1968	1970	1973	1974
	%	%	%	%
I expect to earn more money in the future, so what's the point of saving today?				
Agree	7	6	8	8
No strong opinion	14	19	16	10
Disagree	79	75	76	82

Upper income people and college graduates were most likely to feel the need for saving. In 1974, 89 percent of those with annual family incomes of $15,000 to $20,000 and 84 percent of people with family incomes of $20,000 a year and above were savings-oriented, as were 88 percent of college graduates. Of course, these people presumably have more money to save.

But despite their concern with the future, many Americans feel it is important to enjoy the present; so important, in fact, that they say it is worthwhile to go into debt to do it. In 1974, 34 percent—8 percentage points more than in 1968—agreed with the statement, "We never know what tomorrow will bring, so I think it is important to enjoy life today, even if you have to incur some debts to do it."

Forty-nine percent of respondents with family incomes of $7,500 to $10,000 a year in 1974 believe in "enjoying today," the highest level of any demographic subgroup. By age, those 55 years old and over, are less likely than the younger people to agree with the statement. Of course, people in

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this age range are often most involved in preparing for retirement. From 1968 to 1974, respondents under age 30 grew much more likely to favor enjoying today. In 1968, 25 percent of those under age 30 agreed that it was worthwhile to incur debts to enjoy the present. By 1974, 37 percent agreed.

	1968	1973	1974
	%	%	%
We never know what tomorrow will bring, so I think it is important to enjoy life today — even if you have to incur some debts to do it.			
Agree	26	31	34
No strong opinion	28	28	24
Disagree	45	41	42

These results seem to reflect the conflicting pressures on many Americans. They have a deep awareness of the future, and a realization of the need to save. But a number also have a strong desire to enjoy the present at the expense of the future. In 1974, the proportion who felt the need to save, and the proportion who felt the need to spend and enjoy life today, hit the highest percentages since the Institute started asking these questions.

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OTHER AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS

Youth 1974. A report on the Institute's third biennial survey of Americans ages 14 through 25.

DataTrack—Women. A presentation of current and trend data on evolving work and family roles of women. The findings are related to women as customers and as employees of life insurance companies.

The Life Cycle. A report from the Institute's Trend Analysis Program dealing with trends in life stages and living patterns relating to education, employment, and the family.

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